



NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Distribution

August 23, 2002

Debra W. Yang

United States Attorney
Central District of California

Thom Mrozek, Public Affairs Officer
(213) 894-6947
thom.mrozek@usdoj.gov
www.usdoj.gov/usao/cac

OVER 100 CHARGED IN AIRPORT SECURITY INITIATIVE

MULTI-AGENCY OPERATION LEADS TO ARREST OF WORKERS WITH HIGH-LEVEL ACCESS AT FOUR AIRPORTS, INCLUDING LAX

LOS ANGELES _ Following a nine-month anti-terrorism investigation that examined the employment records of tens of thousands of airport workers, 104 Southern California residents have been indicted on criminal charges for fraudulently obtaining security badges that gave them access to airplanes or the tarmac or allowed them to bypass security checkpoints.

Since yesterday morning, federal authorities have arrested 81 of the defendants, who in most cases face charges of illegally using social security numbers to obtain their high-access badges. In some cases, investigators have not yet been able to determine the true identity of the individuals.

The airport security initiative announced today at a press conference focused on employees with high-level security access badges at LAX, John Wayne Airport, Ontario International Airport, Long Beach Airport and Palm Springs Regional Airport. The initiative joined two significant projects - the Social Security Administration's Operation Safe Travel and the Immigration and Naturalization Service's Operation Tarmac - and received

significant support from the Department of Transportation's Office of Inspector General.

"We now realize that we must strengthen security at our local airports in order to ensure the safety of the traveling public," said United States Attorney Debra W. Yang. "This required us to examine those with access to the most secure portions of the airports. We conducted a thoughtful, careful and complete review of individuals with access to the most sensitive areas, including the planes."

"The goal of the initiative in the Central District of California is to eliminate individuals with access to sensitive areas of airports if they have unknown or questionable identities," Yang continued. "We have taken a proactive approach to identify those who may pose a threat to public safety and national security and we have worked - and will continue to work - collaboratively in this effort."

The individuals charged in the initiative had all obtained Security Identification Display Area - or SIDA - badges that either gave them access to secure areas or allowed them to pass through normal security screening procedures. The United States Attorney's Office only charged defendants who possessed these high-level security access badges.

Many of the defendants are charged with using social security numbers that did not belong to them, essentially committing identity theft. The majority of defendants illegally used social security numbers because they were illegal aliens not authorized to work in the United States or they were attempting to hide a criminal past. In some cases, authorities found outright identity theft. Some of the defendants were carrying multiple social security cards when they were arrested. In other examples:

- "Kimberly Craig," who appears to be in her 40s, is accused

of using the name and social security number of a 12-year-old girl.

- “Roxanne Andrews,” an African-American woman in her mid-30s, is accused of using the name and social security number of another Roxanne Andrews who is white and in her early 20s.
- Hagop K. Bedikian lied about having a prior conviction for carrying a concealed weapon found by authorities who were investigating him in relation to a hit-and-run collision in 1998.
- Michael Keys was using a false social security number so he could collect social security benefits on his true number.

At LAX, investigators examined records related to 39,150 SIDA badge holders. A total of 46 individuals – or approximately 0.12 percent of all SIDA badge holders – were found to have fraudulently obtained their badges. All of these defendants had access either to airplanes or to the tarmac. Out of the 46 who were charged, 33 have been arrested.

At John Wayne Airport, investigators looked into 2,210 people who possessed SIDA badges. Out of that group, it was determined that 51 people had fraudulently used social security numbers to obtain their badges. Of the 51 charged, 41 have been arrested.

At Ontario International Airport, the records of 2,112 SIDA badge holders were examined, revealing that six individuals had misused social security numbers. All six of the charged defendants have been taken into custody.

At Long Beach Airport, only one of 621 SIDA badge holders was found to have fraudulently used a social security number. That individual has been arrested.

At Palm Springs Regional Airport, investigators examined records relating to approximately 600 people who hold SIDA badges. Not one was found to have violated social security or

immigration laws.

The majority of the defendants who were charged and arrested yesterday are accused of violating 42 U.S.C. § 408(a)(7)(B), misuse of a social security number for any reason (a possible five-year prison sentence), as well as 18 U.S.C. § 1546(A), fraud and misuse of documents for authorized stay or employment (a possible 10-year prison sentence).

The INS initiated Operation Tarmac in the wake of the September 11th attacks. Since the operation began, INS has reviewed the records of nearly 200,000 workers at nearly 100 airports across the nation. As a result of Operation Tarmac, criminal charges have been lodged against more than 350 airport workers across the country.

"The INS is committed to using every enforcement tool at its disposal to enhance domestic security and combat terrorism," said Joe Greene, INS Assistant Commissioner for Investigations. "We look forward to continuing to work alongside our federal, state, and local counterparts in this vital effort."

The Social Security Administration's Office of Inspector General has participated in 23 airport security operations across the country since the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

"Millions of social security numbers have been issued to non-citizens, some based on fraudulent documentation," SSA Inspector General James G. Huse Jr. said. "This creates a possible homeland security risk. We will continue to intervene to ensure that no airport employee who has misrepresented his or her SSN and identity has access to secure areas of the nation's airports."

The focus of SSA's Office of Inspector General in airport security operations has been SSN misuse, false statements and immigration violations. A total of 461 people have been arrested to date and, more importantly, have been denied access to secure

areas vulnerable to terrorism.

Kenneth Mead, Inspector General of the U.S. Department of Transportation said: "We are proud to play our part in the effort to ensure that air travel is safe and secure. It is important for the public to know that workers with access to the most secure areas of the airport, such as ramps, gates, and baggage facilities, as well as the planes themselves, are in full compliance with federal laws and regulations."

The success of the Los Angeles-area initiative is the result of an investigation conducted by a task force made up of the Social Security Administration, Office of Inspector General; the Department of Transportation, Office of Inspector General; the Immigration and Naturalization Service; the United States Secret Service; the United States Marshals Service; the Los Angeles International Airport Police Department; the California Department of Motor Vehicles and the John Wayne Airport Police Services. The initiative was coordinated by Assistant United States Attorneys Carole Peterson in Los Angeles and Jeannie Masse in Orange County.